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Duxbury Free Library. Alden Project

Ruling: Town properly awarded library contract

By John Chaffee
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Duxbury

DUXBURY — The attorney general's office has ruled that the town properly awarded the contract for conversion of the former upper Alden School into a new public library.

The award, to J. Slotnik Co. of Newton, submitter of the second-lowest bid, was challenged by the low bidder, Seaver Construction Co. of Woburn.

Seaver bid \$4,464,600 while Slotnik bid \$4,591,485. The town's architect, Norman S. Baier of Galliher, Baier and Best of Simsbury, Conn., reviewed the records of the two companies and concluded that Slotnik was the more competent.

State law requires that public contracts be awarded to the lowest "responsible and eligible" bidder.

In a brief three-page ruling, Assistant Attorney General Francis X. Flaherty Jr. noted that Duxbury "conducted a thorough review of Seaver and made conclusions concerning Seaver's competency to perform the project . . ."

In rejecting Seaver's challenge, Flaherty said courts and reviewing agencies "should not second-guess the honest exercise of discretion by the awarding authority."

Project manager Debbie Bornheimer said the ruling means "we are

about to go forward."

She plans to conduct a pre-construction conference Friday and sign a contract with Slotnik at that time, Bornheimer said.

Seaver can appeal Flaherty's decision to Superior Court. Company officials could not be reached for a reaction yesterday.

In addition to advertising for a company to convert the three-story former school into a handicapped-accessible library, the town sought separate bids for reroofing the 1950 addition on the south side of the original 1927 building and for landscaping the new library grounds.

Architectural and engineering fees will add about \$500,000 to the final cost, Bornheimer said.

And \$1 million is being raised privately to furnish the new library.

All told, converting the one-time high school into a library is expected to cost \$6.3 million. But because of a \$2.1 million state grant and private fund raising, the final cost to taxpayers is expected to be about half that amount.

Bornheimer said Slotnik assured that her the new library can be ready for occupancy by next Labor Day.